

IX. Colusa Subreach Strategy

A major goal of Colusa Subreach Planning was the development of a Strategy for the Colusa Subreach that addresses ecosystem restoration integrated with other land uses in the subreach. As specified in the original Scope of Work for CSP, this Strategy was intended to identify recommended actions for future management of the Subreach. During the four-year planning process a great deal of new information was developed and shared with stakeholders. Existing legal requirements and economic realities were considered and many new ideas were been generated. From all this information a set of recommendations for future management of the Colusa Subreach was developed.

The future direction of the Colusa Subreach will involve decisions made by a wide range of landowners, both private and public. It will also involve determinations made by a number of regulatory agencies representing local, state, and federal governments. As a result, a meaningful strategy must focus on actions that are broadly acceptable to a wide range of stakeholders.

Not every stakeholder will agree with every point included in this Strategy. The perspectives of the stakeholders that have contributed to Colusa Subreach Planning range widely. Nonetheless, this Strategy represents the important concepts that were vetted through Colusa Subreach Planning with the wide range of stakeholders, including: local landowners, other local residents, local governmental agencies, state and federal agencies with jurisdiction in the Colusa Subreach, as well as SRCAF and TNC.

This Strategy will provide the most specific direction to the public and private entities that are involved in ecosystem restoration in the Colusa Subreach. This includes private nonprofits (SRCAF and TNC), state agencies (CDFG, CDPR, and CDWR), and federal agencies (US Fish and Wildlife Service, Army Corps of Engineers, and National Marine Fisheries Service). Colusa Subreach Planning provided the opportunity to direct substantial resources and talent to the questions of ecosystem restoration in a defined area with unprecedented opportunities for local stakeholder involvement. As such, this Strategy expresses direction that considers local perspectives and new science as well as state and federal policy.

The most important functions that occur in the Colusa Subreach are flood management, water supply conveyance, agriculture, recreation, and wildlife habitat. The Colusa Subreach Planning process has concluded that all can coexist compatibly and thrive if management decisions are based on the best available information and if cooperation between stakeholders occurs. The needs of the five key functions should be balanced to achieve a mix of land uses, facilities, and activities that reasonably support the economic, public safety, and environmental needs of all stakeholders. Specific findings related to these five key functions are:

- The use of the river corridor as a floodway is vital to public safety and capacity should not be compromised.
- The use of the river channel as a water supply conduit is vital to the state economy and it should be supported.

- Agriculture is an important land use that is vital to the local economy and it should be supported.
- Recreation uses, which are important to local residents and important to the local economy, should be supported.
- Wildlife habitat in the Subreach is an important resource of local and state significance that should be supported.

Consistent with these findings, land uses in the Subreach should retain a rural character and urban development or residential uses inside of the levees should continue to be precluded due to the frequency of flooding and incompatibility with the five key functions. Individual property rights should be respected for all landowners in the Subreach consistent with the provisions of state and federal law.

The Strategy presented in this Chapter addresses a range of topics that relate to the future physical, economic, and environmental health of the Colusa Subreach. It is composed of individual recommendations that are organized into seven broad subject areas. The term “should” is consistently used as part of the proposed Strategy to reflect the reality that this Strategy does not have legal authority over the various managers.

A. Flood Management

Maintaining the integrity of the floodway is necessary to protect public safety. It is an essential prerequisite to other uses and activities in the Subreach. The following specific standards should apply:

1. Encroachments into the floodway should not impair the function of the flood management system or unreasonably affect neighboring private property.
2. Projects in the floodway that are subject to the jurisdiction of the Central Valley Flood Protection Board should continue to require approval of an encroachment permit to ensure that the integrity of the flood control system is maintained.
3. Projects subject to the jurisdiction of the Central Valley Flood Protection Board should demonstrate through hydraulic modeling of an appropriate level of sophistication that the proposed action will not result in:
 - a. A substantive increase above the Design Flow elevation or the existing conditions elevation, if higher.
 - b. A substantively increase erosion effects on levees, other public infrastructure or neighboring private property.
4. Limited meander consistent with the SRCAF Handbook should be maintained with revetment installation and maintenance occurring only where required to protect the levee system and major public infrastructure features.
5. Levee setback should be considered where appropriate to improve flood flow, protect the levee system and reduce ongoing levee maintenance costs.

B. Recreation

Recreation uses in the Colusa Subreach have great benefit to local and state residents and their contribution to the local economy is substantial. The following specific standards should apply:

1. Compatible recreation such as fishing, boating, hunting, camping, wildlife viewing, photography, hiking, beach activities, and environmental education should be encouraged and supported.
2. Recreation uses should be managed to ensure that private property rights are respected and the wildlife habitat values of the Subreach are not compromised.
3. Implementation of the *Master Plan for the Colusa-Sacramento River State Recreation Area* should be made a priority for the California Department of Parks and Recreation with appropriate funding provided by the State Legislature.
4. Construction of the new boatramp at the CSRSRA should be a priority for the City of Colusa, the California Department of Parks and Recreation and the California Department of Boating and Waterways with appropriate funding provided by the State Legislature.
5. Implementation of the *Colusa Subreach Recreation Access Plan* should be made a priority for the California Department of Fish and Game and other managers of public lands with appropriate funding provided by the State Legislature.
6. The potential for a new boatramp in the Princeton Ferry area, as recommended on the Colusa Subreach Recreation Access Plan, should be investigated by the California Department of Parks and Recreation and/or the California Department of Boating and Waterways with appropriate funding provided by the State Legislature.

C. Management of Public Lands

Effective management of public lands is essential to protect habitat resources, support public recreation, and limit effects on adjoining private property. Provision of adequate resources to support the effective management of public lands in the Subreach is required. The following specific standards should apply:

1. The California Department of Fish and Game should support the Sacramento River Wildlife Area with a management, enforcement, and maintenance effort consistent with the Comprehensive Management Plan for the Sacramento River Wildlife Area with appropriate funding provided by the State Legislature.
2. Provision of new land access to the Units of the Sacramento River Wildlife Area should be dependent upon the provision of adequate management resources.

3. Proposed improvement of the Colusa-Sacramento River State Recreation Area should include provision for additional management, enforcement, and maintenance with appropriate funding provided by the State Legislature.
4. The three properties in the Colusa Subreach that are owned by TNC should be transferred to a public agency to provide for future public use, appropriate management and resource protection. Given the proximity to existing Wildlife Area Units, the California Department of Fish and Game is the most likely long term manager of these properties.
5. Public agencies that manage wildlife habitat in the Subreach should have regular communication with neighboring landowners and other agencies to coordinate on cross boundary issues.
6. State and federal governments should provide Payment in Lieu of Taxes to local government agencies on a consistent and reliable basis with appropriate funding provided by the respective legislatures.

D. Wildlife Habitat on Private Lands

Approximately one-half of the riparian habitat that is located in the Colusa Subreach is on private property. Good stewardship of this area is vital to the ongoing health of the ecosystem. The following specific standards should apply:

1. Maintenance of existing remnant riparian habitat on private lands should be encouraged and additional incentives should be provided to help private landowners support good stewardship of riparian habitat.
2. Landowner participation in programs such as the Ecosystem Restoration on Agricultural Lands Program (ERAL) and the Landowner Incentive Program (LIP), which provide funding for restoration of habitat and ongoing payments for maintenance of this habitat should be encouraged and supported.
3. Development of a riparian buffer area at least 50 feet wide along the river channel should be encouraged to provide a corridor of contiguous riparian habitat and help filter runoff into the river, while maintaining substantial area for ongoing agriculture.
4. Provision of conservation easements to compensate landowners for preservation of substantial areas of riparian habitat, on a willing seller basis, should be encouraged and supported.

E. Regulatory Streamlining

New programs and tools to streamline regulatory compliance and support efficient environmental standards are needed to assist both public and private activities. The following specific standards should apply:

1. The proposed Programmatic Safe Harbor Agreement and Voluntary Local Program, under development by the SRCAF, should be encouraged and supported and other practical methods to simplify Endangered Species Act compliance should be pursued.
2. Restoration projects in the Colusa Subreach should be enrolled in the Programmatic Safe Harbor Agreement and Voluntary Local Program so neighboring landowners and levee maintenance agencies may take advantage of the benefits of these programs.
3. Delisting of threatened and endangered species should occur where supported by the best available science.
4. Development of additional mechanisms to permit the Colusa Subreach and the Sacramento River Conservation Area to function as self-mitigating area, within the provisions of state and federal regulations, should be pursued.
5. Mitigation banking and mitigation projects, like the proposed DWR restoration of the Ward Tract, should be pursued, especially where such mitigation results in cost savings and related public benefits.

F. Acquisition for Habitat Conservation

Future acquisition of land should build upon existing conservation lands and should focus on locations within the Subreach that help to preserve and enhance contiguous areas of riparian habitat. The following specific standards should apply:

1. Acquisition should be only from willing sellers who wish to exercise their right to sell their property to the buyer of their choice.
2. Consistent with the SRCAF *Good Neighbor Policy*, future acquisitions utilizing public funding should include communication with neighboring landowners and review by the SRCAF Technical Advisory Committee and Board of Directors.
3. A key consideration for future acquisition should be portions of the Subreach where acquisition will create contiguous areas of protected habitat that maximize value to wildlife and minimize the interface between agriculture and habitat.

G. Restoration of Riparian Habitat

Future restoration of riparian habitat should focus on locations within the Subreach that help to fill gaps in existing areas of riparian habitat. The following specific standards should apply:

1. Consistent with the SRCAF *Good Neighbor Policy*, future restoration projects should include communication with neighboring landowners and review by the SRCAF Technical Advisory Committee and Board of Directors.

2. Restoration projects should have a single individual identified as the contact person and written documentation should be made of agreements related to project design, buffers, and ongoing management.
3. Restoration projects should be designed to appropriately buffer adjoining cropland areas considering the findings of the *Pest and Regulatory Effects Study*.
4. Restoration projects should demonstrate through appropriate hydraulic modeling that the proposed activity will not impair the function of the flood control system or unreasonably effect neighboring private property and public infrastructure.
5. Restoration projects should be directed to benefit listed and declining species in order to help support delisting of species and preclude additional listings.
6. The Ward Tract should be restored to riparian habitat as proposed by DWR to mitigate the habitat loss resulting from the Tisdale Bypass Sediment Removal Project. DWR should also consider restoration of the remaining Colusa Subreach restoration tracts as a means of providing cost effective mitigation for future flood control projects.
7. The restoration areas on the Womble, Jensen, Stegeman, 1000-Acre Ranch, Boeger, and Colusa North Tracts should be restored to riparian habitat as proposed in the restoration plan for each Tract.
8. Restoration of the Cruise n'Tarry Tract should be at the discretion of the Central Valley Flood Protection Board and DWR subject to compatibility with recreation use of the Tract as proposed by Colusa County pursuant to its lease of the site.